

Testimony Regarding

HB 6824, AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2017, and Making Appropriations Therefor and Other Provisions Related to Revenue

Member Organizations

The Umbrella Center for Domestic Violence Services

Ansonia, CT

The Center for Family Justice

Bridgeport, CT

Women's Center

Danbury, CT

Domestic Violence Program

United Services

Dayville, CT

Network Against Domestic Abuse

Enfield, CT

Domestic Abuse Services

Greenwich YWCA

Greenwich, CT

Interval House

Hartford, CT

Meriden-Wallingford Chrysalis

Meriden, CT

New Horizons

Middletown, CT

Prudence Crandall Center

New Britain, CT

The Umbrella Center for Domestic Violence Services

New Haven, CT

Safe Futures

New London, CT

Domestic Violence Crisis Center

Norwalk, CT

Women's Support Services

Sharon, CT

Domestic Violence Crisis Center

Stamford, CT

Susan B. Anthony Project

Torrington, CT

Safe Haven

Waterbury, CT

Domestic Violence Program

United Services

Willimantic, CT

Department of Social Services Budget

Appropriations Committee

February 27, 2015

Good afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Flexer, Representative Abercrombie and members of the committee. CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) is the state's leading voice for victims of domestic violence and our 18 member organizations that serve them. Our members provide essential services to nearly 50,000 victims of domestic violence each year. Services provided include 24-hour crisis response, emergency shelter, safety planning, counseling, support groups and court advocacy.

Potential Impact of the Closure of the Torrington Regional DSS Office

CCADV has two member organizations whose clients regularly access the Torrington Regional Office of the Department of Social Services (DSS) – Women's Support Services (WSS) and Susan B. Anthony Project (SBAP). WSS serves victims in the towns of Canaan, Cornwall, Kent, North Canaan, Salisbury, and Sharon. SBAP serves victims of domestic violence in the towns of Barkhamsted, Colebrook, Goshen, Hartland, Harwinton, Litchfield, Morris, New Hartford, Norfolk, Thomaston, Torrington, Warren, Washington, and Winchester. Closure of the Torrington Regional Office will be devastating to the victims in these areas who need to access DSS services.

As you know, many clients receiving DSS support do not have their own cars. Instead they rely on public transportation, which, at best, can be considered minimal in the Northwest corner of the state. Lack of public transportation can be a challenge for clients living in Torrington, let alone those living as far away as Salisbury or North Canaan. And even if the individual is fortunate enough to have their own car, drive times from the outskirts of this area to Torrington are already lengthy (see table 1).

Secretary Barnes stated in his budget presentation to this committee that it is expected that clients currently served in the Torrington office will instead receive services in the Waterbury Regional Office. The Danbury Regional Office may also be an option for some. Table 1 below represents the drive times via car from the catchment area served by WSS to the Torrington, Waterbury and Danbury Regional DSS offices.

Table 1

Town	Travel Via Car							
	Torrington		Waterbury			Danbury		
	Miles	Time	Miles	Time	Time Diff	Miles	Time	Time Diff
Canaan (Falls Village)	24	35	40	55	20	45	70	35
Cornwall	15	23	30	40	17	38	60	37
Kent	31	42	30	45	3	42	57	15
North Canaan (Canaan)	25	35	47	55	20	55	75	40
Salisbury/Lakeville	32	45	44	60	15	50	75	30
Sharon	26	40	41	56	16	43	60	20

(OVER)

As you can see from the chart, those traveling via car from those towns will have to add anywhere from a few minutes to up to 40 minutes of additional travel time, depending on where they live and what office they need to access. In some cases, they are doubling their travel time. The same can be said for those victims living in the towns served by SBAP, particularly those traveling from the northernmost towns of Norfolk, Colebrook and Hartland. Individuals seeking DSS services will now have to take additional time off of work, often a difficult or impossible thing to do in low-paying jobs, or they may need to seek childcare for longer periods of time, potentially at an added cost. The cost of gas will also be an ongoing hardship given the increased distance.

And for those many individuals who do not have their own car or a car that they can borrow, they must rely on the incredibly scarce public transportation available in the Northwest corner. CT Transit has 6 divisions spanning the state; however, none of those divisions provide service to the Northwest corner. There are 11 public bus options. Only one, Northwestern CT Transit District, covers the Northwest corner. The service utilizes 5 fixed routes Monday through Friday and 1 route on Saturday. These routes are for fixed areas/towns allowing for travel within a particular town, but not between towns. A Dial-A-Ride service is provided, but it must be booked in advance, by appointment and is dependent on availability as it is a small chartered bus that can only accommodate a limited number of people. WSS often finds it challenging to secure space on this service for last minute needs.

The large private intercity bus operations are also limited in this area. When considering WSS' catchment area, Greyhound only provides service from Canaan/North Canaan. Table 2 demonstrates the travel times and cost for residents of this town to get to Waterbury via Greyhound. As the chart reflects, for victims living in the Northwest Corner utilizing this bus service to get to Waterbury, accessing DSS will become an daylong event.

Table 2

Greyhound Bus Service								
Departing	Arriving	Depart Time	Arrive Time	Travel Time	Depart Time	Arrive Time	Travel Time	Cost
Canaan	Torrington	11:30am	12:15pm	45	5:45pm	6:20pm	35	\$18
	Waterbury	11:30am	12:45pm	75	5:45pm	6:45pm	60	\$25
	Danbury	n/a	n/a	n/a	5:45pm	7:20pm	95	\$19

Taxi service is also limited in the Northwest corner. The cheapest fare that WSS has found just to get to the Torrington DSS Regional Office has been \$70-75 range. This is not a viable option. The cost to take a cab even further would not be realistic for anyone seeking DSS subsidies.

Victims receiving services through WSS or SBAP are often fortunate enough to have program staff transport them to the DSS office. Both organizations spend a significant amount of staff time assisting victims with accessing basic needs services through DSS. Staff often accompany victims to the regional office to attend meetings with them and advocate on their behalf to ensure that their needs are met. It is an incredible demand on staff time and financial resources with the existing office in the area. Closing the Torrington Regional Office will mean that either more staff time and financial resources will be needed to provide this high level of service and assist victims with getting to Waterbury, something that will undoubtedly not be reimbursed in any manner. Or providing this service will simply no longer be feasible, potentially leaving the most vulnerable even more vulnerable.

We recognize the incredibly difficult financial position the state is in, but we strongly encourage you to maintain the Torrington Regional Office of DSS and ensure that basic human needs services remain available and easily accessible in that area. It is simply unrealistic to think that individuals receiving DSS subsidies and services have the resources to easily travel further for those services given the lack of public transportation in Connecticut in general, but especially in the Northwest corner of the state.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.

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